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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

(For the period from 21 January 2006 to 18 July 2006)

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1655 (2006) of 31 January 2006, by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for a further period of six months, until 31 July 2006. It covers developments since the previous report, dated 18 January 2006 (S/2006/26).

II. Situation in the area of operation

2. The situation in the UNIFIL area of operation remained tense and volatile, although it was generally quiet during most of the reporting period. This situation completely changed on 12 July, when the current hostilities broke out and the area was plunged into the most serious conflict in decades.

3. The crisis started when, around 9 a.m. local time, Hizbollah launched several rockets from Lebanese territory across the withdrawal line (the so-called Blue Line) towards Israel Defense Forces (IDF) positions near the coast and in the area of the Israeli town of Zarit. In parallel, Hizbollah fighters crossed the Blue Line into Israel and attacked an IDF patrol. Hizbollah captured two IDF soldiers, killed three others and wounded two more. The captured soldiers were taken into Lebanon. Subsequent to the attack on the patrol, a heavy exchange of fire ensued across the Blue Line between Hizbollah and IDF. While the exchange of fire stretched over the entire length of the Line, it was heaviest in the areas west of Bint Jubayl and in the Shab'a farms area. Hizbollah targeted IDF positions and Israeli towns south of the Blue Line. Israel retaliated by ground, air and sea attacks. In addition to airstrikes on Hizbollah positions, IDF targeted numerous roads and bridges in southern Lebanon within and outside the UNIFIL area of operations. IDF has stated that those attacks were to "prevent Hizbollah from transferring the abducted soldiers". At least one IDF tank and an IDF platoon crossed into Lebanon in the area of the Hizbollah attack in an attempt to rescue the captured soldiers. An explosive device detonated under the tank, killing four more IDF soldiers. An eighth IDF soldier was reportedly killed in fighting that ensued during an attempt to retrieve the four bodies. That

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night, the IDF issued a warning to UNIFIL that any person — including United Nations personnel — moving close to the Blue Line would be shot at.

4. In the afternoon of 12 July local time, the Government of Lebanon requested UNIFIL to broker a ceasefire. Israel responded that a ceasefire would be contingent upon the return of the captured soldiers.

5. Hostilities within and outside the UNIFIL area of operations have continued without interruption since 12 July. Israel continues to conduct large-scale airstrikes on infrastructure and strategic targets throughout Lebanon, including the Beirut international airport, which has since remained closed, the port, various Beirut suburbs and towns further north along the coast and in the Bekaa Valley. The Beirut-Damascus highway and other routes connecting Lebanon to the Syrian Arab Republic have also been bombed. Many fuel depots and petrol stations have been destroyed. Within the UNIFIL area of operations, IDF bombings have damaged or destroyed Hizbollah positions in addition to most roads and bridges, obstructing movement throughout the south of the country. Early in the conflict, Israeli planes also dropped leaflets across Lebanon warning the population to avoid areas known for Hizbollah's presence.

6. Hizbollah rocket attacks have hit many communities in northern Israel and have reached as far south as Haifa and Tiberias, some 35 kilometres from the Blue Line, causing civilian casualties and damaging buildings. An Israeli gunboat patrolling off the coast of Lebanon was hit by a missile on 14 July, causing severe damage. The body of one Israeli sailor was found, while three others remain missing. The reported number of Israeli casualties amounts to 12 IDF soldiers and 13 civilians.

7. On the morning of 15 July, IDF announced via loudspeakers to the residents of Ayta ash Shab and Marwahin that they should vacate their villages. UNIFIL observed a large-scale exodus from Ayta ash Shab. However, a large group of villagers from Marwahin approached United Nations observation post Hin and position 1-21 on foot, requesting shelter and humanitarian assistance. UNIFIL explained that it was not in a position to provide humanitarian assistance to the villagers and asked them to return to their homes, where they would be safer. That evening and overnight, two UNIFIL armoured personnel carriers were stationed in Marwahin for the villagers' protection.

8. In an unrelated incident that day, 18 Lebanese civilians, including women and children, were killed on the road between Al Bayyadah and Shama villages as they were fleeing from Marwahin in two vehicles. Contrary to what was reported in the media, these were not the same civilians who had approached UNIFIL for shelter previously. UNIFIL took the initiative to retrieve the bodies of the civilians. The Force came under fire during the recovery mission. One UNIFIL soldier sustained an injury to his eye when a demonstrator threw a piece of glass at him during the recovery mission. In response to a request from the Government of Lebanon, the following day UNIFIL evacuated 283 inhabitants from Marwahin to Tyre. The convoy came under fire during the evacuation, but no injuries were sustained.

9. Also on 15 July, UNIFIL was informed by IDF that Israel would establish a "special security zone" between 21 villages along the Blue Line and the Israeli technical fence. IDF informed UNIFIL that any vehicles entering the area would be shot at. This security zone would be directly within the UNIFIL area of operation,

which would make it impossible to support (or evacuate, if necessary) many UNIFIL positions that are located in the zone. Furthermore, it would prevent UNIFIL from discharging its mandate. I have expressed to the Israeli Prime Minister the concerns of the United Nations about such a "security zone" and the essential need for UNIFIL to be able to immediately resume full freedom of movement throughout its area of operation.

10. Repeated IDF airstrikes have also hit the city of Tyre and its residential areas, where about 150 United Nations personnel and their dependants live. Despite repeated requests to Israel by the Force Commander, General Alain Pellegrini, and United Nations Headquarters, bombing of the Tyre pocket has continued. On 17 July, one building, in which a UNIFIL international staff member and his family were residing, was hit and collapsed. The staff member and his spouse remain unaccounted for. A UNIFIL search-and-rescue effort had to be called off owing to damage to the roads, which made the transport of heavy equipment from the UNIFIL engineering battalion near Al Hinniyah to Tyre impossible. United Nations personnel and their dependants have since gathered at the United Nations Rest House hotel in Tyre. Following the declaration of security phase three, which calls for the evacuation of non-essential staff and their dependants, preparations are under way for the relocation of UNIFIL dependants and non-essential staff from Tyre.

11. IDF has conducted small-scale temporary incursions into Lebanese territory with bulldozers and tanks near Rosh HaNiqra and Ghajar to destroy Hizbollah positions. It has also erected concrete blocks around the northern part of Ghajar village, and its troops are reported to be operating in the northern part of the village.

12. According to Lebanese Government sources, IDF shelling across the Blue Line and airstrikes have resulted in the death of more than 250 Lebanese civilians and a far larger number of wounded. An unspecified number of Hizbollah fighters have been killed and injured.

13. UNIFIL estimates that approximately 50 per cent of the local population has left the villages in the south. The mission is closely coordinating with the Lebanese authorities to address the humanitarian needs of the population that remains in the villages. To that end, UNIFIL and the Lebanese authorities established a joint coordination centre for humanitarian activities in two locations: Tyre in the west and Marjayoun in the east. Most requests received by the centre are for humanitarian escorts to relocate civilians, as well as the wounded and dead. The ongoing hostilities and the destruction of roads seriously restrict the mission's freedom of movement and hamper its ability to respond to such requests.

14. UNIFIL has requested IDF to authorize "windows" to patrol the Blue Line and to allow the passage of logistical convoys to supply its positions. While UNIFIL was able to carry out two logistical convoys, no authorization was given for patrolling of the Blue Line.

15. Three UNIFIL positions (1-21 near Marwahin, 6-44 near At Tiri and 8-33 near Hula) have been hit by IDF fire. On 17 July, one artillery smoke bomb penetrated the roof of a prefabricated living shelter at position 1-21. The bomb did not detonate but did cause damage to the roof of the shelter. No personnel were injured. On 16 July, two IDF artillery shells exploded inside position 6-44, near At Tiri, causing major damage to prefabricated living quarters and two containers. UNIFIL troops were in shelters at the time and there were no casualties. The same day position

8-33, near Hula, was hit by two IDF tank rounds. One soldier was seriously injured by shrapnel and was evacuated to the Indian battalion headquarters for immediate medical treatment. He is reported to be in stable condition. In addition, UNIFIL has reported more than 48 instances of firing close to its positions.

16. Prior to the outbreak of hostilities across the Blue Line on 12 July, the situation in the UNIFIL area of operation during most of the reporting period was tense and volatile, although generally quiet. The ceasefire was breached and heavy exchanges across the Blue Line occurred at the beginning of February and at the end of May. One Lebanese civilian and one Hizbollah member were reportedly killed, and three Israeli soldiers, three Lebanese civilians and a number of Hizbollah members were wounded in the fighting. Tension along the Line was elevated, and IDF troops were on a high state of alert during the months of March, May, June and July. Israeli air violations decreased during the first half of the reporting period, but occurred again more frequently during the second half of May. Ground violations of the Line were attributable primarily to crossings by Lebanese shepherds and continued on an almost daily basis.

17. On 1 February, IDF opened fire and killed a young Lebanese shepherd inside Lebanese territory in the general area of the Shab'a farms. IDF claimed that the shepherd had been armed and that he had crossed the Blue Line on two earlier occasions that day. A UNIFIL investigation found no evidence to suggest that the shepherd had had any hostile intentions or that his weapon had been used. The shooting incident underlined the need for IDF to act with maximum restraint and to respect fully the Blue Line. It also illustrated the necessity for the Government of Lebanon to make additional efforts to prevent ground violations of the Blue Line, including in the Shab'a farms area.

18. On 3 February, Hizbollah launched rocket attacks on a number of IDF positions in the Shab'a farms area, wounding one soldier. The attack was reportedly in retaliation for the killing of the shepherd two days earlier. IDF responded with air strikes and artillery, mortar and tank fire against Hizbollah positions in the area from which Hizbollah fire had emanated. Hizbollah responded with rocket and mortar fire in the area. UNIFIL recorded one incident of IDF firing close to a UNIFIL position near Kafr Shuba. One Lebanese civilian was wounded in the air strike. After a one-and-a-half-hour exchange, UNIFIL succeeded in brokering a ceasefire through the liaison channels with the parties.

19. In a serious breach of the ceasefire in the early morning of 28 May, unidentified armed elements launched at least eight rockets from the general area of Aynata across the Blue Line into Israel. Three rockets impacted inside an IDF position on Mount Meron, in Upper Galilee, some 8 kilometres south of the Line, causing material damage and lightly wounding one soldier. Hizbollah denied any involvement in the attack. Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Lebanon initially claimed responsibility in retaliation for the killing of a leading member in Lebanon and his brother on 26 May in a car bomb explosion in Saida. The claim was retracted later that day. The Lebanese authorities have taken an official position against attacks emanating from their territory. In a letter dated 1 June 2006, they informed me that the Lebanese Army Command, in conjunction with UNIFIL, would conduct the investigations necessary to ascertain the circumstances of the firing of missiles from Lebanese territory with a view to putting an end to them. The Lebanese Government subsequently alleged that Israel was involved in the attack in Saida; Israel denied it.

20. Later in the morning of 28 May, IDF retaliated with air strikes against military installations of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine — General Command in Naameh, 15 kilometres south of Beirut, and in the Sultan Yacoub area in the Bekaa Valley. One member was reportedly killed and eight were wounded in the air strikes.

21. In the afternoon of the same day, unidentified armed elements fired small arms from the general area of Hula on the Lebanese side, directed at Manara village on the Israeli side. One IDF soldier was reportedly seriously wounded. There was no claim of responsibility, and Hizbollah denied any involvement in the shooting. The incident triggered a major exchange of fire in different areas along the Blue Line, from the coast to the Shab'a farms in the east. IDF retaliated with a significant number of air strikes and artillery, mortar and tank fire, causing extensive damage to a number of Hizbollah positions. One Hizbollah member was killed and several more were injured. Two Lebanese civilians were also wounded, and several houses of civilians were damaged. Hizbollah responded with rocket, mortar and small-arms fire. UNIFIL was in close contact with the parties during the exchange of fire with a view to arranging a ceasefire and preventing further escalation. After approximately two hours of heavy exchanges, UNIFIL and my senior representatives in the area succeeded in brokering a cessation of hostilities.

22. In the course of the exchange of fire, UNIFIL recorded a number of cases of IDF firing close to UNIFIL positions 8-32, 8-32A and 8-33 in the general area of Hula, position 1-31, in the vicinity of Alma ash Shab, and patrol base Hin of Observer Group Lebanon. Position 8-32 suffered significant material damage as a result of a bush fire ignited by the IDF fire. UNIFIL also recorded a number of incidents of Hizbollah small-arms fire from the vicinity of the same United Nations positions. These incidents are of serious concern because they endanger the lives of United Nations personnel and property. UNIFIL strongly protested the incidents to both sides.

23. Persistent and provocative Israeli air incursions, occasionally reaching deep into Lebanese airspace and generating sonic booms over populated areas, remained a matter of serious concern. The pattern identified in my previous reports continued, whereby the aircraft would sometimes fly out to sea and enter Lebanese airspace north of the UNIFIL area of operation, thus avoiding direct observation and verification by UNIFIL. The air incursions violate Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity, elevate tension and disrupt the fragile calm along the Blue Line. A reduction in the number of air incursions in April contributed to an atmosphere of relative calm along the Blue Line, but this trend was reversed in May.

24. There were no instances of Hizbollah anti-aircraft fire across the Blue Line during the reporting period.

25. UNIFIL recorded a number of Lebanese ground violations of the Blue Line, primarily by shepherds. Such violations had become an almost daily routine, often involving the same local shepherds. On 1 February, IDF killed a Lebanese shepherd. UNIFIL had urged the Lebanese authorities to take concrete measures on the ground to prevent such violations, particularly by shepherds in the Shab'a farms area. Meanwhile, UNIFIL and Observer Group Lebanon patrols warned the local population about the danger of crossing the Blue Line.

26. Demonstrations on the Lebanese side of the Blue Line occurred periodically at points of friction identified in my previous reports, namely Sheikh Abbad Hill, east of Hula, and Fatima gate, west of Metulla. The demonstrators occasionally threw stones and other objects at IDF positions. These incidents caused apprehension among IDF personnel but did not escalate further.

27. The Lebanese Government's authority and security control remained limited, especially in the areas close to the Blue Line. The Lebanese Army maintained a presence in some of the areas vacated by Israel in May 2000, but at a distance from the Blue Line. The Joint Security Force, comprising Army and internal security forces, continued to conduct mobile patrols and maintain several checkpoints in the UNIFIL area of operation. Its presence and activities were more visible during periods of heightened tension. At the request of UNIFIL, the Joint Security Force intervened on a few occasions to control demonstrations and avert possible incidents. However, it did not operate in some sensitive points along the Blue Line, such as the Ghajar area. UNIFIL continues to maintain a static patrol presence along the northern side of Ghajar. Army demining teams cleared mines in some areas close to the Blue Line, while Army engineering teams fenced the minefields along the Line in the Ghajar area and south-east of Hula.

28. Control of the Blue Line and its vicinity appears to have remained for the most part with Hizbollah. During the reporting period, Hizbollah maintained and reinforced a visible presence in the area, with permanent observation posts, temporary checkpoints and patrols. It continued to carry out intensive construction works to strengthen and expand some of its fixed positions, install additional technical equipment, such as cameras, establish new positions close to the Blue Line and build new access roads. These measures resulted in a more strategically laid out and fortified structure of Hizbollah's deployment along the Blue Line. Some Hizbollah positions remained in close proximity to United Nations positions, especially in the Hula area, posing a significant security risk to United Nations personnel and equipment, as demonstrated during the heavy exchanges of fire on 28 May. In letters to the Foreign Minister, dated 23 March, 27 June and 5 July 2006, the Force Commander, General Pellegrini, expressed grave concern about the Hizbollah construction works in close proximity to United Nations positions and requested that the Government of Lebanon take necessary actions to rectify the situation. However, the situation remained unchanged despite repeated objections addressed by UNIFIL to the Lebanese authorities. UNIFIL observed the reconstruction of Hizbollah positions that were damaged or destroyed during the 28 May exchange of fire.

29. UNIFIL encountered an increase of temporary denials of access by Hizbollah in different areas along the Blue Line. On one occasion Hizbollah searched a UNIFIL vehicle and temporarily confiscated United Nations equipment. In general, the Force was able to regain and assert its freedom of movement within a short period of time and, in some instances, with the assistance of the Lebanese authorities.

30. General Pellegrini and my Personal Representative for Lebanon, Geir Pedersen, held regular discussions with the highest Lebanese political and military officials on the expansion of the Government's authority, including the deployment of the armed forces in the south, the activities and presence of the Joint Security Force and the establishment of a joint planning cell, as called for by the Security

Council in its resolution 1655 (2006). The Government of Lebanon, according to a statement made by Prime Minister Fouad Siniora to the Council on 21 April, acknowledged the "natural obligation of the State to be the sole provider of security to all its citizens and residents, and the right of the State to have a monopoly over arms and to exercise its full authority throughout the country". The Government considers that reconciling these rights and obligations with the issues currently being discussed as part of the national dialogue, including a Lebanese defence strategy and the issue of the Shab'a farms, will be "a major challenge to be addressed in the period ahead".

31. As indicated in my previous report, the liaison between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Army as further strengthened as a result of the move of the Army Liaison Office to UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura and the appointment of one liaison officer in each of the two UNIFIL field battalions on a permanent basis. The Lebanese Army Command defined specific tasks of the Liaison Office in the operational, administrative and humanitarian fields. It occasionally accompanied UNIFIL patrols and assisted UNIFIL during the investigation of some operational and security incidents.

32. The Government also responded positively to the UNIFIL proposal to establish a permanent position in the Naqoura port staffed with 100 troops. Preparations were about to begin when the current hostilities erupted.

33. In a letter to the Prime Minister dated 31 May 2006, General Pellegrini put forward some ideas concerning the formation of a joint planning cell. He suggested that the cell be composed of representatives of the Lebanese Armed Forces, relevant ministries and UNIFIL. The cell's terms of reference would include drawing up a detailed plan for strengthening security and government authority in the south, deploying armed forces and enhancing coordination and cooperation on the ground between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces. Consultations between UNIFIL and the Lebanese authorities on establishing a joint planning cell were ongoing when the current hostilities broke out.

34. UNIFIL continued to assist the civilian population with medical and dental care, water projects, equipment or services for schools and orphanages and supplied social services to the needy. Veterinary assistance was also provided. The resources for UNIFIL assistance were made available primarily by troop-contributing countries. UNIFIL cooperated closely on humanitarian matters with the Lebanese authorities, United Nations agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross, embassies and other organizations and agencies operating in Lebanon.

35. The presence of a large number of minefields throughout the UNIFIL area of operation, especially along the Blue Line, remained a source of danger and a cause of serious concern. During the reporting period, UNIFIL cleared the area of some 8,100 square metres, surveyed the roads, continued marking and fencing known minefields and demolished 586 mines and rounds of unexploded ordnance. In the past, IDF handed over a substantial amount of information on the presence of minefields in the area. However, information about some areas close to the Blue Line is still lacking.

III. Organizational matters

36. Until the current crisis erupted, UNIFIL continued its efforts to maintain the ceasefire in the area of operation through ground and air patrols, observation from fixed positions and close contact with the parties, the latter with a view to correcting the violations, resolving incidents and preventing escalation. Its operations were concentrated along the Blue Line, although the Force maintained a few rear positions. The United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), through Observer Group Lebanon, supported UNIFIL in the fulfilment of its mandate. Since the beginning of hostilities on 12 July, UNIFIL military personnel have been confined to their positions, and during the heaviest exchanges of fire had to take shelter in bunkers. The Force's operations have consequently been significantly limited, and it has not been able to conduct its regular air or ground patrols.

37. As at 30 June 2006, UNIFIL comprised 1,990 troops, from China (187), France (209), Ghana (648), India (673), Ireland (5), Italy (53), Poland (214) and Ukraine (1). UNIFIL was assisted in its tasks by 51 military observers of UNTSO. A map showing the current deployment of UNIFIL is attached. With effect from 16 April, the Ukrainian engineering and demining contingent was replaced by a contingent from China. In addition, UNIFIL employed 408 civilian staff, of whom 102 were recruited internationally and 306 locally. General Pellegrini continued as Force Commander. Mr. Pedersen continued to act as my Personal Representative for Lebanon.

38. Since the establishment of UNIFIL, 246 members of the Force have lost their lives, 79 as a result of firings or bomb explosions, 105 as a result of accidents and 62 from other causes. Firings or mine explosions wounded a total of 345.

IV. Financial matters

39. By its resolution 60/278 of 30 June 2006, the General Assembly appropriated to the Special Account for UNIFIL the amount of $93.5 million gross, equivalent to $7.8 million per month, for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2007. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of the Force beyond 31 July 2006, as recommended in paragraph 43 below, the cost of maintaining the Force will be limited to the amounts approved by the Assembly.

40. As at 30 April 2006, unpaid assessed contributions to the UNIFIL Special Account amounted to $71 million. Total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations at the same date amounted to $1,639.9 million. As at 31 May 2006, amounts owed to troop contributors totalled $4.7 million. Reimbursement of troop and contingent-owned equipment costs have been made up to 30 April and 31 March 2006, respectively, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

V. Observations

41. The hostilities between Hizbollah and Israel since 12 July have radically changed the context in which UNIFIL is operating. In the current environment, circumstances conducive to United Nations peacekeeping do not exist. Facing a

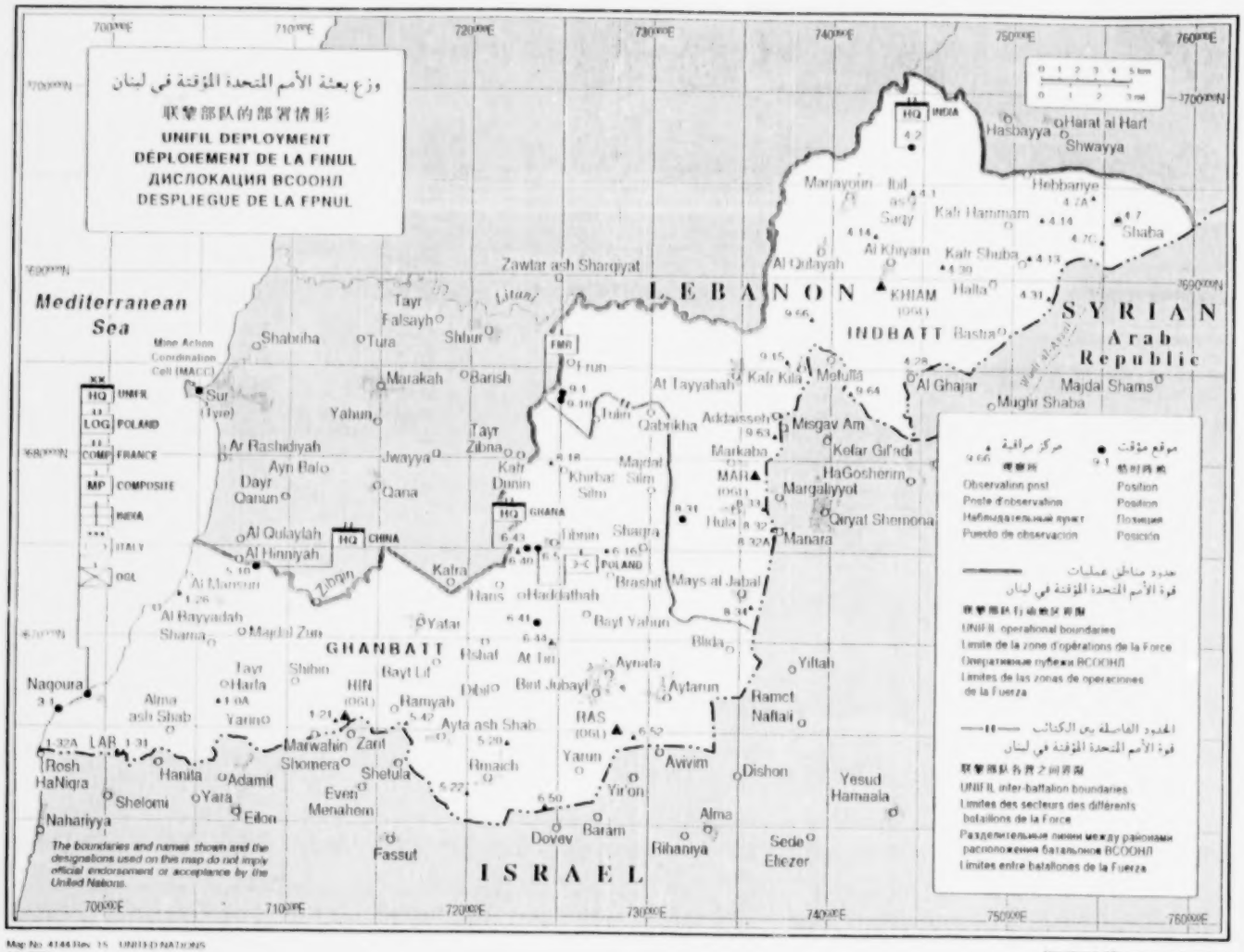
situation where the Force is restricted from carrying out even basic activities, such as the ability to resupply its positions and to conduct search and rescue operations on behalf of its personnel, how can it fulfil its mandate under Security Council resolution 425 (1978)?

42. Since January 2001, when I reported (S/2001/66) that UNIFIL had completed two parts of its mandate (i.e. confirmed the withdrawal of Israeli forces and assisted, to the extent it could, the Lebanese authorities as they returned to the area vacated by Israel), the Security Council has expressed, in successive resolutions, its support for continued efforts by UNIFIL to maintain the ceasefire along the withdrawal line, through patrols and observation from fixed positions and through close contacts with the parties, with a view to correcting violations and preventing the escalation of incidents. Furthermore, for many years, UNIFIL has traditionally provided humanitarian assistance to the local population in its area of operation — a situation which today is scarcely possible, though humanitarian convoys are being facilitated as and where possible, often at great risk to UNIFIL personnel. However in the current circumstances, with constant firing along the Blue Line, where roads and bridges and other critical infrastructure throughout its area of operation have been destroyed, and where its freedom of movement is continuously impeded, UNIFIL cannot resume its work in a meaningful way. A cessation of hostilities will be essential for this to be possible.

43. Nevertheless, as the current mandate of UNIFIL will expire on 31 July, I have received a letter dated 7 July 2006 (S/2006/496) from the Charge d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations conveying to me her Government's request that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further period of six months. Today, in a situation where a return to the status quo ante does not appear feasible and with a view to providing the Security Council the time required to consider all possible options for future arrangements in South Lebanon, I instead recommend that the Council should extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a period of one month.

44. Future decisions by the Security Council notwithstanding, I must draw attention to the serious shortfall in the funding of the Force. At present, unpaid assessments amount to $71 million. That represents money owed to the Member States contributing the troops that make up UNIFIL. I appeal to all Member States to pay their assessments promptly and in full, and to clear all remaining arrears. I should like to express my gratitude to the Governments contributing troops to the Force, particularly the developing countries, for their understanding and patience in these difficult circumstances.

45. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to Alvaro De Soto, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Geir Pedersen, my Personal Representative for Lebanon, and Major General Clive Lilley, the Chief of Staff of UNTSO, and to pay tribute to General Alain Pellegrini, Force Commander, and the men and women of UNIFIL and the Observer Group Lebanon for the brave manner in which they have carried out their difficult and dangerous tasks, especially during the current hostilities. Their discipline and bearing have been of a high order, reflecting credit on themselves, their countries and the United Nations. The family of the UNIFIL staff member and his wife, who as yet remain unaccounted for after events on 17 July in Tyre, are in my thoughts. I wish to assure them that the United Nations will do everything possible to ascertain their whereabouts.



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